Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Syed Ali)

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For 60 years, I have retreated — no, escaped — to open, unspoiled spaces to engage the intellect and spirit, sometimes simply to confront darker places in life without

denial or fear. Open, unspoiled space fills up those spaces in my soul that need filling up.

One morning in late October, the first catch of my eye is my cat, Hobette, basking in the sunlight at the bay window. I have learned a lesson about space from Hobette. He feels none of the human compulsion to compete, or win, or own anything, or to be better, or to do more than the next cat. He simply seeks his own space to purr, to observe, to make decisions — that is, of course, after he has been fed.

I spoon Hobette a bowl of food. And now I am free to leave for the open spaces of autumn in Valley Green.

Here, autumn arrives fresh in so many ways: tall timbers swaying in the crisp, unwearied feel of the air; bended boughs with leaves aflame in a fortune's worth of gold and red, yellow and rust; an unexhausted sun. Here this beauty in space takes me beyond politics and sports, beyond paying the bills and mortgage, beyond the culture of building against space by commercial developers, beyond noise pollution, and beyond the virtual world that seemingly has seized control of our souls.

Indeed, space accommodates and crystallizes ideas, thoughts and values. Its beauty softens my edge of perception and I can close my mouth and open my mind. It alerts me to my soul's destiny — that this life will not be end with termination but transformation, not separation but transcendence. The words Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote about Henry David Thoreau surround me: "Wherever there is knowledge, wherever there is virtue, wherever there is beauty, he will find a home."

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About a couple hours into my escape, I run into an old friend whom I hadn't seen in two, three years. I had heard he was battling cancer and things were grim.

"Chris, good to see you," I said. "It's been a while."

"I had a dustup with cancer," he says, "but it's in remission, and I feel good, at peace." I could see it, sense it, feel it in his eyes — they were lightning rods for a heart and soul at peace.

As Chris departs to continue his journey, I say. "It's good to know you are OK."

"Thank the Lord," Chris shouts.

Valley Green in autumn swells with faith. I hear God's voice in the rushing falls of the creek — sounds of spiritual cleansing. Virtues of the soul don't disintegrate like a sand castle under a surging wave. These sounds and sights only strengthen a trust in God.

My hourslong, solo drift in Valley Green summons up, in perfect simpatico, something Edmond Rostand wrote in his play "Cyrano": "There comes one moment, once — and God help those who pass that moment by — when beauty stands staring into the soul with grave, sweet eyes that sicken at pretty words." The words turn the abstract into particular meanings: It cuts out the comedy of living according to how others think we should live, what we should eat, or do, or even think — a crush of information and opinions crowding us.

I recall a saying I learned long ago: Forget about raving at the dark moments so you don't forego the light of the sun.

When I return home, Hobette is once again sitting in the bay window, and as soon as he sees me, he jumps off and scampers to meet me. I have been gone for a long time but Hobette exhibits none of the symptoms of being forgotten, over not being "first." He simply rubs against my leg. He is hungry. I feed him. He finishes and finds his own space.

This daylong journey from life's ordinary assaults on our peace and quiet was simply not just a change of scenery, but also a change of attitude: a reawakening of innocence that often gets lost, or at least misplaced, by becoming an adult. It brings me moments of clarity and glimpses of harmony and goodness — gifts of God.

Valley Green worked its alchemy. This journey played out like a buffet of fuller meanings — bricks and mortar poetry with caresses on the sly, allowing my mind, body and spirit to breathe and discover more of myself. Now, as I settle down to read the evening newspaper, my soul experiences peace.

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